

Internet Fraud

Persons selling via the Internet are advised to be extremely careful when dealing with potential buyers, particularly those selling to buyers from outside of the United States.

A number of frauds have been reported to the Dodge County Sheriff's Office in recent months. These frauds typically involve buyers from Nigeria or the United Kingdom. The fraud is accomplished in the following manner:

A person listing something for sale on eBay or another Internet selling forum (most likely an automobile or a pet) will receive an e-mail from a party claiming to be from Nigeria and very interested in buying what the seller has for sale. The buyer will agree to the purchase and will explain that he or she has a friend, agent, associate or family member living in the United States who will arrange to pick the item up. A cashier's check will arrive via FedEx. That check will be in a sum far in excess of the agreed purchase price. The buyer will explain that the seller is to cash the check and send the overage to the seller by Western Union. The seller learns, only after the check has been cashed that it is a forgery. Often times this is too late and that the overage has been already sent.

Lately, these people have added a new twist to their activities. Once the "overage" has been returned to the buyer, the buyer will re-contact the seller with a story regarding an accident, illness or death and claim they will have to back out of the sale. A request is then made for the seller to return all the money sent by the buyer.

This activity involves very skilled and convincing criminals. Several simple precautions can help you guard against falling to victim to these criminals. Be extremely careful when dealing with people who claim to be from Nigeria or Great Britain. Be skeptical and ask yourself why anyone would wish to (or could profit from) importing a second hand automobile to Africa. Check the cashier's check for a watermark. Deposit the cashier's check into your bank account but do not spend or send any money until the bank has cleared the check. Ask the bank to notify you when the check is cleared. Tell your banker of your concerns regarding the check if you are asked to wire money to anyone. Basically be skeptical and ask yourself; Is the item you are selling available in Africa? Has the buyer been over anxious to complete the sale? Is there anything suspicious about this transaction? Why would someone send extra money when buying your item?

The persons responsible for these crimes are very convincing, patient and clever. They have made millions of dollars off of unsuspecting sellers. It is believed these frauds originate in Great Britain. It is important to understand that the Internet is an extremely complex network of systems that will route a message to the quickest route possible which makes it very difficult to track the suspects. These criminals know how to take advantage of the system to hide their true locations. Most often they use rented post office boxes which are very difficult to be traced.

Should you have any questions on this or any other crime, please feel free to contact the Dodge County Sheriff's Office at 920-386-3726. As always, buyer beware, and in this case, seller beware.